

# Right to Disconnect Policy

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Version 1.0

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<b>Feedback</b> or issues arising on implementation of this policy should be communicated to the policy author.	
<b>Policy Author:</b>	HR Managers

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## 1. Introduction

South East Technological University recognises that the health and wellbeing of employees is of the utmost importance and encourages and supports employees to prioritise their own wellbeing and make use of personal time.

Disconnecting from work and work-related activities outside of normal working hours and during periods of leave, including the right to refrain from engaging with work related electronic communications such as emails, telephone calls, meeting participation requests, work text messages, or social media messages, is vital for employee wellbeing, and to help achieve a healthy and sustainable work-life balance.

Every employee is entitled to cease work activities outside of their normal working hours / scheduled roster and leave periods to enjoy their personal time away from work without being disturbed. While unforeseen circumstances may arise that require an employee to be contacted outside of normal working hours, this should be the exception rather than the norm (e.g. urgent queries relating to payroll).

This policy is based on the Workplace Relations Commission's Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect ("the WRC Code of Practice") available at:

[https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what\\_you\\_should\\_know/codes\\_practice/code-of-practice-for-employers-and-employees-on-the-right-to-disconnect.pdf](https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/codes_practice/code-of-practice-for-employers-and-employees-on-the-right-to-disconnect.pdf)

The Code of Practice provides practical guidance for SETU as an employer and for SETU employees to assist in meeting existing obligations under current employment legislation. Specifically, the Code complements and supports employers' and employees' rights and obligations under the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997, the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, and the Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994 to 2014.

## 2. Purpose

This policy has been produced to highlight that all SETU employees have a right to disconnect from work and work related devices outside of their normal working hours and to set out the rights and obligations of the university, management and employees in this regard. This policy also outlines SETU's commitment to ensure there is a supportive environment, which enables employees to disconnect from the workplace.

As stated in the WRC Code of Practice, there may be on occasions, legitimate situations when it is necessary to contact colleagues, or students outside of normal working hours to meet the needs of SETU, including but not limited to:

- Checking availability for rosters/to fill in at short notice for a sick colleague where appropriate to the grade,
- Where unforeseeable circumstances may arise,

- Where an emergency may arise,
- Where business and operational reasons require contact out of normal working hours.

This list is not exhaustive and there may be other situations when it is necessary to contact colleagues outside of normal working hours. However, this must not be a frequent occurrence and steps should be taken by management to address the issue if there is a frequent occurrence.

### 3. Scope

This policy applies to all employees of SETU regardless of whether the employee is working at SETU premises or off-site (including hybrid working arrangements). It applies to full-time and part-time employees across all employee categories.

### 4. Definitions

The term 'Right to Disconnect' as provided for in the WRC Code of Practice refers to the following:

- the right of an employee to not have to routinely perform work outside their normal working hours (including refraining from engaging in work-related emails, telephone calls, or social media messages);
- the right not to be penalised for refusing to attend to work matters outside of normal working hours; and
- the duty to respect another person's Right to Disconnect (for example: by not routinely emailing, messaging or calling outside normal working hours).

### 5. Roles and Responsibilities

SETU encourages the ongoing cultivation of a culture where employees feel they can disconnect from work and work-related devices and this necessitates a joint approach by the university, managers, and employees.

All employees have an active role to play in communication, management of their time and respecting their own right to disconnect outside normal working hours. Some of the respective obligations include:

#### 5.1 Line Managers

All managers are primarily responsible for ensuring that policies, procedures and processes within their work areas are adhered to. As part of that responsibility line managers are required to:

- Disseminate and communicate the Right to Disconnect Policy to all employees within their area of responsibility;
- Respond to issues raised by an employee in a timely manner;
- Provide information to new and existing employees on their working times, normal working hours and rest periods/breaks and the arrangements for recording working time and rest breaks/periods (both at the employer's work premises and off site/remote working);
- Inform employees of the procedures to follow if they are unable to avail of a statutory rest break or period;
- Ensure that all employees receive their entitlement to rest periods/breaks and that they do not work in excess of the maximum weekly working hours as provided for in the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997;
- Schedule meetings at appropriate times having regard to employees' rest breaks normal working hours and family commitments;
- Engage with employees in relation to availing of their annual leave entitlements during the leave year;
- Promote work/life balance – employees' personal time must be respected and there is a general expectation that employees disconnect from work emails and any other work-related duties/communications outside of their normal working hours and during any type of leave/rest days;
- Outline the circumstances in which it may be necessary for managers to contact employees' outside of their normal working hours due to urgent service needs or unforeseeable circumstances;
- Advise on appropriate email etiquette including the timing and tone of any out of hours communications and the use of email 'out of office' and footers to indicate the employee's normal hours of work/availability where applicable;
- Maintain open channels of communication about workload and time management and encourage appropriate behaviours around disconnecting from work;
- Take appropriate action if an employee shows signs of not disconnecting from work in line with this policy and consider factors such as workload, performance issues or organisational culture; This could include meeting with the employee and encouraging them to take appropriate breaks.
- Managers should respect the Right to Disconnect of their team members and should demonstrate clear commitment to the Policy through leadership and being active role models in this respect.

## 5.2 Employees

The obligations of employees include the following:

- Fully cooperate with any agreed appropriate mechanism to record working time;
- Be mindful of colleagues' right to disconnect (for example, by not routinely emailing, calling, texting or social media messaging relating to work related issues outside normal working hours);
- Be conscious of work patterns (including periods of leave) and be aware of work-related wellbeing and take action if necessary;
- Raise any concerns informally with their line manager see section 7 below.

### 5.3 Human Resources

- Disseminate the Right to Disconnect Policy to all employees;
- Communicate the policy to new employees as part of their induction process;
- Ensure that existing obligations under existing legislation, spanning working time, rest periods and providing a safe workplace to protect employees from working excessive hours are met in relation to the Right to Disconnect policy;
- Provide information on working hours, rest periods/breaks and annual leave entitlements in the employee's written contract of employment/ SETU policies/ circulars and notify the employee in writing of any changes;
- Ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to record working time (on site and remote working) including late roster finishes, untaken rest breaks/periods etc. and to identify the requirement to grant compensatory rest, where appropriate, in accordance with the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997;
- Inform employees of how to access organisational supports e.g. Health and Safety, Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Service (EAS) and their relevant trade union/employee association as required;
- Support line managers with the discharge of their managerial responsibilities in relation to the right to disconnect;
- Support employees with the operationalisation and implementation of the policy and their right to disconnect;
- Respond to issues raised by an employee in a timely manner;
- Review the effectiveness of the policy on an ongoing basis through discussion with management and trade union representatives.

## 6. Principals and Procedures

### 6.1 Working Hours

All employees should be informed of their contracted working hours, normal times of attendance, rest breaks/periods, leave entitlements and, where applicable, rostering arrangements. The employee's right to disconnect outside of their working hours (including rest days, annual leave, sick leave or any form of statutory leave) should be respected. All employees have the right to disconnect in the context of their contracted working hours. If an employee has any queries regarding their working hours they should contact their line manager in the first instance.

### 6.2 Communications (Electronic and Phone)

Where possible, communications including e-mails, meeting invitations, phone and social communications should be checked and/or sent during normal working hours. Emergency communications outside of an employee's normal working hours/roster should be the exception rather than the norm.

Some employees depending on their role may be provided with handheld devices, including but not limited to a mobile phone, laptop or tablet. It is important to be aware that these

devices are provided to employees to allow flexibility in how employees complete their work. This does not imply that the employee makes themselves available for work, outside of their normal working hours unless there is an emergency situation.

Due to differing/non-standard patterns of work in the university, employees may send communications at times which are inopportune for other employees, e.g., late evenings / early mornings/ weekends. As such, the tone and sense of urgency in written communications should be proportionate, particularly those sent outside of normal working hours. Such communications sent outside of normal working hours have the potential to be easily misinterpreted by the recipient as to its urgency. Where appropriate, the sender should give due consideration to the timing of their communication and potential for disturbance. The recipient should understand that they will not be expected to respond until their working time recommences, unless business and operational needs dictate that an immediate response is required.

If employees are sending emails outside the normal hours of the working day, they should also consider the following:

- Sending e-mail with a subject disclaimer *For reading during your working hours only* and/or adding the following to the opening line *No response required outside of normal working hours*
- Sending e-mail with a signature disclaimer at the end, e.g. *'There is no expectation that work emails will be actioned outside normal working hours'*.
- Consider drafting the email and sending it during normal working hours or using the 'delay send' option and set it to a specified time on the next working day.

Work communications through social media channels or platforms are not encouraged and employees should not feel that they must respond to social communications from colleagues outside of their working hours.

Employees should ensure automatic out of office messages are used for notifications of leave or other messages as approved by management. The response should advise the sender that you are out of the office, and that you will respond to their email on your return or provide alternative contact point details in the automatic response.

### 6.3 Meetings

The scheduling of meetings should take account of an employee's normal working hours.

While meetings can be crucial to strengthen connections between individuals and groups, managers are encouraged to review the frequency and timing of meetings they hold to ensure optimum use of time and allow colleagues time to work outside of meetings.

An employee's right to disconnect outside of their working hours (including rest days, annual leave, sick leave or any form of statutory leave) should also be respected with regards to meeting attendance/participation. Where possible, if meetings are scheduled when a



participant is due to be on leave from the university, the meeting participant should request a rescheduling or explore avenues for nominating an appropriate colleague to assume their place/role within the meeting. If an employee has any queries on this aspect of the right to disconnect, they should contact their Manager.

## 7. Raising Concerns

Managers and employees should manage the right to disconnect in a manner that is respectful of everyone's rights and expectations and in the context of the relevant legislation and good workplace relations generally.

It is recognised that circumstances may occasionally arise that necessitate that communications are sent and received outside of an employee's normal working hours. This may be due to operational needs and other factors including the role of the employee, the agreed terms of employment and the unique requirement of critical services.

When occasional contact outside normal working hours/scheduled rostering arrangements becomes the norm, this needs to be addressed informally in the first instance and if necessary, under SETU's Grievance Procedure.

Situations may arise where an employee may feel that their right to disconnect is not being respected or that their workload is such that they are not able to disconnect at the end of their normal working day/shift. Examples of such situations might include:

- Being contacted regularly outside of normal work hours;
- Being expected to regularly work through meal breaks;
- Feeling obligated to routinely work longer hours than those agreed in their terms and conditions of employment;
- Inability to leave work on time due to excessive workload;
- Being subjected to less favourable treatment for not being available outside of normal working hours.

If an employee encounters problems in availing of their right to disconnect, they should speak with their line manager in the first instance if they feel comfortable to do so. In circumstances where an employee feels that they cannot approach their line manager, they should contact another manager at a higher level or seek advice/support from their HR Department.

If issues/complaints cannot be resolved informally, employees may invoke the formal stages of the Grievance Procedure and seek advice and support from the relevant trade union/employee association if necessary. Issues not resolved through the grievance procedure may be referred to the appropriate third party.

## 8. Workplace Health and Wellbeing Supports

SETU Employee Assistance Service Spectrum Life provides a confidential counselling support and referral service for all employees with personal or work-related issues. Contact details for the EAS are available online at the following link: [here](#)

## 9. Compliance

It is expected that all employees of the University and all members of the University Governing Body will comply with this policy. SETU reserves the right to amend and update this policy over time in line with best practice, consultation procedures and any changes in legislation.

## 10. Supporting/Related Documents

The policy should be read in conjunction with other policies on:

- Email policy
- Dignity and Respect Policy/Procedure for Employees

SETU reserves the right to amend and update this policy over time in line with best practice, consultation procedures and any changes in legislation.

## 11. Useful Links

[Policies page](#)

## 12. Document Control

Date Policy approved:

## 13. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed in advance of the review date i.e. 16 January 2027, and/or as soon as possible following new or updated legislation, national or sectoral policy.

## 14. Policy Author

The authors of this policy are the SETU HR Managers. Any feedback or issues arising on implementation of this policy should be communicated to the policy authors. They are responsible to ensure that the Policy Owner is aware of these comments when reviewing the policy.

## Appendix 1 - References

Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the right to Disconnect [Online]  
Available from: [code-of-practice-for-employers-and-employees-on-the-right-to-disconnect.pdf \(workplacereactions.ie\)](#)